DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 617 CG 013 405

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TITLE The Major Contributors to Quality of Life for the Elderly.
PUB DATE 1 Sep 78
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Critical Incidents Method; *Environmental Influences; *Family Influence; *Individual Needs; Interviews; National Surveys; *Older Adults; *Quality of Life; *Work Experience

ABSTRACT

Factors contributing to the quality of life of older adults were investigated. A national survey provided the data which were collected in four-hour interviews from a representative national sample of 800 persons 68 to 72 years old when interviewed. The respondents reported on aspects of their quality of life related to their family, education, and work history, and the specific factors that were adding to or detracting from it. Only 17% of the men and 14% of the women report their quality of life to be "fair" or "poor." Results indicate that material comforts, health and personal safety, learning, and active recreation are most frequently mentioned as detracting from quality of life. (Author)

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The Major Contributors to Quality of Life for the Elderly

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September 1, 1978

Presented at the APA meeting in Toronto, Canada

THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE ELDERLY

This report is based on the results of a preliminary analysis of a national survey of the quality of life of 70-year-olds. The 15 contributors to the quality of life of adult Americans were determined in a previous national study in which 6,500 critical incidents were collected reporting on experiences contributing either positively or negatively to the quality of life of that individual.

The data reported here were collected from a representative national sample of 800 persons who were 68 to 72 years old at the time of the interview. The respondents participated in a three- to four-hour interview reporting on their family, education, and work history along with their present quality of life and what specific factors they felt were adding to or detracting from it.

The results for this national sample of 70-year-olds are reported in Table 1. Looking first at the percentages of males and females who report that each of the 15 components is either important or very important to their quality of life, it is noted that four factors are reported as important by more than 80% of both groups. These are Health and personal safety, Material comforts, Having and raising children, and Understanding yourself. For the men, Close relationship with a wife is also rated this high (most of the women at this age do not have a husband). The women rate Close friends this high (presumably their alternate to a close relationship with a spouse). For all six of these factors, 69% or more of these groups report their needs are well or very well met. The areas in which they report that their needs and wants are least well met include Participation in government and public affairs, Active recreation, Learning, Relationship with relatives, Expressing

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Table 1

Analysis of the Reports from National Samples of 800 70-Year-Old Men and Women Regarding the Contributors to Their Quality of Life

		In Percentages									
		Rating of Important or Very Important		Rating of Needs Well Met or Very Well Met		Said Tends To Make Quality of Life Good		Said Tends To Make Quality of Life Poor		Correlation Between Needs Met & Overall Quality of Life	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1.	Material Comforts	88	86	76	74	28	19	24	31	.48	.39
2.	Health & Personal Safety	95	96	85	80	25	28	24	30	.45	.33
3.	Relationships with Relatives	62	79	73	69	12	22	8	8	.20	.10
4.	Having & Raising Children	82	86	82	84	32	38	9	6	.25	.01
5.	Close Relationship with Husband/Wife	85	43	87	69	46	23	6	16	.35	.18
6.	Close Friends	74	88	80	78	20	33	5	4	.31	.21
7.	Helping Others	65	80	72	74	24	32	5	3	.23	.22
8.	Participation in Government	65	57	64	61	5	2	18	17	.22	.22
9.	Learning or Intellectual Development	52	59	73	65	8	8	23	18	.32	.22
10.	Understanding Yourself	81	87	76	80	15	16	4	8	.24	.29
11.	Work	58	60	76	76	17	11	14	12	.38	.30
12.	Expressing Yourself	37	60	74	72	8	16	14	9	.35	.23
13.	Socializing	51	62	73	73	6	10	14	9	.30	.27
14.	Passive Recreation	53	64	82	79	20	26	8	3	.07	.22
15.	Active Recreation	47	51	64	65	20	10	21	21	.38	.32

Multiple Correlation Coefficient for Males is .65 and for Females is .52

yourself creatively, Socializing, and Helping and encouraging others.

Using a somewhat more specific and slightly different question, "Of the 15 areas affecting your quality of life, which three tend most to make it good?," resulted in larger differences between the reports of men and women. For the men, Close relationship with a wife was well ahead of the other areas followed by Having and raising children, Material comforts, and Health and personal safety, in that order. For the women, Having and raising children was most frequently mentioned followed by Close friends, Helping and encouraging others, Health and personal safety, Passive recreation, and Close relation with a husband.

The negative counterpart of this question, ". . . which three tend most to prevent you from having a better quality of life?" produced responses for the men and the women that were in much greater agreement. For both groups, the four areas most frequently mentioned included Material comforts, Health and personal safety, Active recreation, and Learning.

A somewhat different approach to determining the major contributors to the quality of life of these 70-year-olds involved asking them, "At the present time how would you describe your overall quality of life--Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, or Poor?" There was a very slight tendency for the men to select the extremes with 54% of the men as compared to 51% of the women reporting their overall quality of life as Very good or Excellent and 19% of the men as compared to 16% of the women reporting their quality of life as only Fair or Poor. These overall reports of their quality of life were then correlated with each individual's responses to the questions on how well their needs and wants were met in the 15 areas. It was found that using weights based on the importance the individual assigned to the area resulted

in a small increase in these correlation coefficients and in the multiple correlation. The multiple correlation coefficients, 0.65 for the men and 0.52 for the women, provide an indication of how well the overall quality of life report can be predicted from the reports on how well needs and wants were met in the 15 areas.

It is clear that reports on Material comforts, Health and personal safety, Active recreation, Work, and, for the men, Expressing yourself creatively and Close relationship with a wife tended to agree best with those on overall quality of life. The smallest correlations with overall quality of life reports were for Having and raising children, Relationships with relatives, Passive recreation, Participation in government and public affairs, and Helping and encouraging others. It is interesting to note that three of these five, including Relationships with relatives, Helping and encouraging others, and Participation in government and public affairs, were reported as areas in which their needs and wants were least well met. They also tended not to be areas rated as of great importance to these individuals' quality of life.

The correlation coefficients between overall quality of life and total family income for 70-year-olds are 0.27 for the males and 0.16 for the females. The median total family incomes for these two groups are $7,000 for 70-year-old men and $5,500 for 70-year-old women. Although these correlations lend further support to the major contribution of money to overall quality of life, it should also be noted that the 70-year-old men with much less than half the income of the 50-year-old group report almost as good an overall quality of life. Clearly, these judgments are relative ones.

The biserial correlation coefficient between self-report of overall quality of life and whether the individual is married or not married is 0.35

for 70-year-old men. For 70-year-old women, the large majority of whom are not married, the coefficient was still positive but much smaller at 0.13.

The other objective variable was highest level of education reached. The correlation coefficients for the 70-year-olds were 0.26 for the men and 0.16 for the women. These results continue the trend of lower predictability for the overall quality of life of the 70-year-old women. This poorer prediction was also found for the 70-year-old women on the reports of the extent to which needs and wants were met on the 15 quality of life components.

Statistical analyses of various reports by representative national samples such as these can provide useful data regarding both basic conditions and trends. However, such analyses contain basic defects as a source of information for improving the quality of life of individuals.

The data obtained for each of the individuals from the three- to four-hour interview can be summarized in a seven- to eleven-page abstract. In preparing the abstracts, critical factors affecting their development are noted. This type of analysis that uses the individual as the unit and tabulates the crucial factors in both development and present status is called monadic analysis.

Monadic analysis is intended to supplement the types of survey data presented in the preceding analyses. The descriptive characteristics regarding a person collected in typical surveys require no previous history, no specific context, and no other descriptive information about the person. Attitudes, evaluations, preferences, interests, abilities, and events can be tabulated without reference to other characteristics or past history of the individuals involved. Monadic analysis is concerned with studying the history, context, and present status of an individual to determine crucial factors, causes,

and possible improvements in a person's life.

Identifying causal factors that determine an individual's present quality of life requires abundant information of both a developmental and historical type and also comprehensive information on the influences and context involved in the individual's present life situation. The most useful data from monadic analysis will come from studies of representative samples of important types of populations. The findings from studies of such samples can be generalized to describe the characteristics of the populations on which they are based.

An illustration of the insights that can be obtained using monadic analysis is provided by reviewing the abstract of Barbara Ryan, a very intelligent 70-year-old woman, who was an English teacher for 34 years. She was divorced after 15 years of marriage because her husband, a lawyer, became an alcoholic. Her only child, a son, is a college professor.

She lives alone and describes her overall quality of life as only "fair." The principal factor interfering with her present quality of life is lack of convenient and inexpensive public transportation services. Other deficiencies in her community are an inadequate public library, poor quality TV programs, inadequate health services, and the unavailability of appropriate courses or study groups.

James Collins is another 70-year-old who describes his overall quality of life as only "fair." Jim reports that "Retirement has been terrible" mainly because of "boredom" but also because he feels he needs a couple hundred dollars more a month. He has not looked for work because his wife's health is poor and she demands constant care. A home health care program that would allow Jim to get a part-time job and have an opportunity to see other people

would greatly improve his quality of life.

What is needed at this time is to complete the abstracts on these 70-year-olds and identify and tabulate the critical factors that would result in the greatest improvement in their quality of life. It is hoped that this monadic analysis would provide the essential guidelines for more effective social programs.